P780186-1888

December 13, 1978

1877

Dear Mr. Butler:

The Secretary has asked me to thank you for your letter of December 6, 1978 requesting information about the U.S. response to the Guyana tragedy. As you know, the United States Government continues to be involved in this tragic episode and is investigating various aspects of the situation. Nevertheless, I wanted to give you an early response to the questions you have raised concerning this unprecedented matter.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life. As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle; and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time.

The Honorable
M. Caldwell Butler,
House of Representatives.

DECLASS...
RELEASE [illegible]
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the U.S. Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially less than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to appropriate congressional committees on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the U.S. Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell. His telephone is 632-8562.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

180-1573

ARA/PPC:JSchreiber:mbb # [redacted]

Clearances: Inter-Agency
ARA:GLister
ARA:JBushnell
H:ENef
EN/cw

M. CALDWELL BUTLER
5TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

MEMBER:
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
COMMITTEE ON
SMALL BUSINESS

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
409 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-5431

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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

CONSTITUENT SERVICE OFFICES:
101 U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE BUILDING
900 CHURCH STREET
LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA 24505
(804) 845-1378

111 FEDERAL BUILDING AND POST OFFICE
200 S. WAYNE AVENUE
P.O. BOX 1045
WAYNESBORO, VIRGINIA 22980
(703) 942-7758
(IN STAUNTON DIAL "0" ASK FOR ENTERPRISE 734)

402 RICHARD H. POFF FEDERAL BUILDING
AND U.S. COURTHOUSE
210 W. FRANKLIN ROAD
P.O. BOX 865
ROANOKE, VIRGINIA 24005
(703) 982-6200

December 6, 1978

The Honorable Cyrus R. Vance
The Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

ACTION
is assigned to
ARA

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I have been contacted by a number of constituents regarding the cost to the U.S. government of the tragedy at the Peoples' Temple community in Jonestown, Guyana.

I would appreciate your advising me as to the statutory authority for the government's decision to evacuate, embalm, identify, and transport the bodies from the Peoples' Temple community in Jonestown, Guyana to the United States. I am also interested in a cost analysis of the Jonestown operation to the U.S. government. Thank you for your cooperation.

With best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, I am

Very truly yours,

M. Caldwell Butler

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